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ABSTRACT

This lecture explains the history, purpose, and future of the Danish folk high school, considered a small but vital part of that country's adult education system. As an introduction, the term, folk high school, is defined to mean a school for young adults, usually nineteen or twenty years old, which deals with the individual's role in life and society. In examining the historical background of these schools from the Napoleonic wars to the present, emphasis is placed on two influential personalities who emerged in the 1800's. Following a brief biography of Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig, the founder of the folkelighed, or folk high school, is a synopsis of his educational philosophy and that of his disciple, Christen Kold. Three purposes are identified for the schools: (1) to make students love and understand their national history, culture, and art; (2) to awaken them to the wealth of spiritual life; and (3) to help educate them to assume civic and democratic responsibility. The current status of the schools and their future value are both considered as well as the sponsors and public support for the whole area of adult education. Also included is a short commentary on the folk high school in Sweden and Norway. (ELG)

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THE DANISH FOLK HIGH SCHOOL

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When an American educator or philosopher writes a book it will be read in Denmark at the samt time as in US - and it will probably be translated into Danish within 1 or 2 years.

When an educational philosopher as Grundtvig or a philosopher as Kirkegaard write a book in Denmark it may well take about a hundred years before it is known in America - not to speak of translation. When a Danish book is eventually translated many of the ideas may have been "reinvented", and are not new any more.

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The Folk High School.

I should like to underline that quantitatively speaking - if you count participants - the folk colleges make up less than 1 % of the total adult education activity in Denmark.

If you look at the expenditures the folk colleges - or the folk high schools - have a more prominent position in the overall adult education. They make up about 10%. And certainly, seen from outside - the folk high schools dominate completely.

If for instance American adult educators have heard anything about adult education in Denmark - they have heard about folk high schools - even though the understanding of the concept, for natural reasons, may be vague.

There is no doubt about the tremendous impact the folk high school as a movement has had on all adult education, and on some parts of the formal educational system - and on the cultural pattern of Denmark today.

But still it is a very minor part of our adult education - and maybe the impact has given the rest of our education a special flavour which distinguishes it from others, and makes it worth while looking at.

Let me conclude my introductory remarks by stating that I have gradually moved from the expression Folk College to the expression Folk High School. For many reasons it is the officially used term for the Danish Folkehøjskole and the equivalents in the other Nordic languages.

It is a high school or a college or an academy - or a university for the people above the age of 18.

Maybe the folk high school concept and the practical experiences we have with this alternative in the Scandinavian countries can add some aspects and dimensions to the American discussion on continuing education.

Even though folk high schools are only dealing with general, non-vocational education - mainly for young adults.

They intend to create a learning community in a small scale using personal communication as the basic teaching method. It is an open invitation to get together and discuss and reflect upon essential questions of life and society, to make the individual aware of his or her position, situation and capacities - and to make mutual responsibility and consideration a reality.

The first folk high school, which is still in existence, in Rødding, was founded in 1844 and influenced by the thinking of a bishop and historian by the name of Grundtvig.

The Historical background.

So to get an idea of what it is all about it is necessary to go back in history. About 170 or 200 years - if you want to get a feeling of the characteristics of the Danish Folk High School - as a sort of movement.

In the backwaters of the Napoleonic wars, Denmark had come to a standstill - politically, economically, and socially. A conservative reaction was noticeable all over Europe, and seemingly also very strongly in our little country which had been forced to side with Napoléon, and then had lost the possession of Norway - the two countries had formed a union for about 500 years; - had lost all its navy, prior to that Denmark-Norway had been one of the dominant naval nations and very active in international trade; but worst of all, it also to some extent had lost its sense of national identity and pride.

The men of the Enlightenment, who during happier times in the

1780's and onward, had carried out radical peasant reforms; abolished serfdom; introduced reforms inside the criminal law; put an end to slavery in overseas colonies, and established a commission for education of the masses, these men had died or been removed from political influence.

An agricultural crisis, enforced by ignorance and lack of education among the now free farmers, threatened to remove the ground under the all important source of the country's economy.

Close to 80% of the population were occupied in agriculture - today it is less than 10%; and industry, which was growing in England and elsewhere in Western European countries, was practically non-existing in Denmark. - Agriculture and trade had been the main sources of income.

On the surface the country was dead, and the period was marked by the national bankruptcy about 1815.

Adult Education - 1814.

However, as a result of the work in the educational commission, which I mentioned, compulsory education was enacted for all children between the age of 7 and 14 in 1814.

This law also made provisions for evening classes for the adult population in the country, and must be regarded as the first attempt from the authorities to establish an organized country-wide system of adult education. Some succesful experiences in this field had been gained by the agronomical societies back in the 1750's - and an attempt had been made in 1799 of establishing an agricultural college for young farmers to teach them better methods - but it had failed.

The burden of carrying out the adult education activities according to the 1814 Act was placed on the village teachers, who in most instances were untrained for the task - and, what may be more important, did not receive any remuneration for this extra work.

Consequently the effects of this part of the Education Act

were not convincing, and the agricultural crisis, mentioned above, made the motivation on the part of the adult farmers still weaker.

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New Ideas.

But below the surface something was happening.

In some parts of the country a laymen's movement in strong opposition to the State church was growing, based on the influence of pietism. These lay preachers felt that the rationalistic ideas advocated by the State church did not fulfil their religious yearning. They stressed the importance of the individual soul and the religious experiences of the individual - and this movement spread, offering not only religious consolation, but also - and this later on became very important - an opportunity for the ordinary simple man to stand up and speak for himself, to give voice to his feelings and ideas in front of a group of peers.

In the upper strata of the population, liberalistic ideas and demands for changes of the absolute system were making themselves felt.

Liberal newspapers and periodicals were founded, and on the impression of the nationalistic movements in other parts of Europe, and the influence of Romanticism the vision of a democratic state based on national feelings and traditions was being shaped.

The pressure became so strong that in 1831 the King, who still possessed absolute power, decided to introduce a system of advisory councils in the provinces.

For about 200 years Denmark was an absolute monarchy. The social, educational, and economic reforms late in the eighteenth century were carried out under the auspices of this absolute monarch - and they were "liberal" and forward looking.

In these advisory councils (in 1831) some farmers also gained seats.

The Revolution in France 1830 and the spread of revolutionary ideas throughout Europe during the thirties and fourties led many to fear the danger of a social revolution in Denmark.

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Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig.

In this situation the ground was prepared for the work of an outstanding personality, the poet, historian, educational philosopher and clergyman N.F.S. Grundtvig, 1783-1872.

Grundtvig had grown up in a parish minister's home, in an atmosphere of pietistic devotion and a rather conservative outlook on life. He had himself studied theology with the intention of following in his father's footsteps.

His experiences with formal education had been very unrewarding, and he felt that the classical education, centred around the Latin language and the humanistic tradition, could be well fit for those who wanted to become scholars, - but for the clergymen, civil servants, lawyers, doctors, and other professions concerned with living human beings, and not with scientific and theoretical studies, a different type of education was needed.

The breakthrough in his educational thinking came, however, rather late.

After a series of quarrels and controversies within the church he concentrated on historical studies, and grants from the King enabled him to go to England, where he stayed at Oxford and Cambridge in 1829, 30 and 31 to study Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.

At the English universities he experienced college life, and he became a member of the learned community of students and teachers living together under one roof; studying, discussing, having meals, enjoying life together.

In the midst of an era with revolutionary movements growing and spreading in the countries of Europe, threatening to overthrow the established order of things, Grundtvig's remedy was not that of power or violent repression - but of education.

In the introduction to his book "Mythology of the North" (= the Scandinavian countries), published in 1832, he writes the following:

"Unless the school is reformed so that from being a tomb and a grave for the children it may develop into a plant nursery for life, the death struggles of the revolution will sweep across all the nations and eradicate both learned and unlearned alike".

He goes on to make the suggestion of an academy for the people, an institution based on the Danish and Nordic (Scandinavian) traditions, and not on the "detrimental spirit of Rome" - as the formal classical education he himself had esperienced had been.

The Living Word.

Such an academy must be based on "the living word" and the free interaction between students and teachers, and not on "the dead letter" and formal teaching. In his first draft the academy was meant for the leaders of the people - an alternative to the traditional university. But in several books and writings during the 1830's Grundtvig developed his ideas.

He reacted strongly against the barren belief in rational reasoning, which would favour practical skills and dull science. The belief that everything can be measured, weighed, and calculated involves a risk of confining man to a sort of machine, a barren rational being. "But" Grundtvig said, "man is no monkey. He is a devine experiment, revealing how spirit and dust can impregnate each other and be glorified in a united devine consciousness."

The human mind or spirit is the vitality, which is in the human being, and raises it above animals.

What this vitality is, and from where it comes, can never be clarified by the sciences, - but the effects are clear enough - it is all human life; and first and foremost it manifests itself in the speech. The human spirit is the invisible vitality which

reveals itself in the word, in the human speech, which no other living creature can grasp or produce.

The speech, the living word, has a very central position in the educational thinking of Grundtvig.

It is only by the living word that one can make human beings realize life and its conditions.

And, what is important, the living word can only be expressed in your mother tongue.

The aim of education is not to give knowledge, - but to enligheten about human life.

The Folkelighed.

You cannot understand more of life than you have experienced, Grundtvig says, but this applies both to the individual and to the group or the society to which the individual belongs, and is an integral part of.

For this reason history, the great experience of mankind, is the cornerstone of all enlightenment.

The human aspect or approach is complemented by the popular or national aspect (the folkelige, in Danish).

As indicated above, man does not exist as an isolated individual, not as an "I", but only as part of a popular or national context. Through the people (folkeligheden) the human being is united with world and time.

"Folkelighed" through Grundtvig got a new and very special meaning, which is difficult to translate. It has a lot to do with history, with the place you live in, with your countrymen. It is culture as an integral part of a people.

In this context it is important to stress that folkelighed in the sense Grundtvig used it - and how it is still used - does not lead to patriotism or nationalism.

By discussing major and minor problems of the day in a spirit of friendliness and comradeship you get to know yourself - your potentialities, you become open-minded and tolerant and accept mutual responsibility.

By stressing "folkelighed" - culture in its widest sense as an integral part of the people - as the basis and the aim of human interaction you'll get to understand not only your own position in a global perspective - but you will also understand and accept the "folkelighed" of other people.

Grundtvig saw the world full of an infinitude of peoples, each with their own mother tongue and pecular general spirit. These peoples were not each others' enemies - but each is a special expressive of the human spirit's endeavour to strive on to a revelation of the mystery of life.

Grundtvigians do not like internationalism as it is often expressed nowadays. - That is politically founded and tends to level out the spirit of the individual people. - Therefore it should not be international cooperation, but a cooperation between or among the peoples - respecting and accepting one another, sharing mutual responsibility for the destiny of mankind. It is "mellemfolkeligt samvirke".

Grundtvig's emphasize on the human and popular aspect made him fight all the then existing educational system, which was not deeply rooted in the life and history of the people itself, and which did not use the mother tongue and the living word.

Five Concepts and the Aim.

To sum up:

the educational ideas of Grundtvig centred around a few basic concepts which all became significant for the folk high school pattern, when later it came into existence.

Firstly, he believed in an "education for life", i.e. for civic life and responsibility; for ability to deal with real situations; for an existence in our time in this country - as opposed to the formal education which is, or was, alike everywhere in the world, aiming at the classical humanistic ideals.

Secondly, he stressed the importance of the "living word", as an instrument of communication from one man to another, not so much to impart knowledge but to create a human understanding.

The "living word" was the spark which was to kindle.

Thirdly, a "living interaction" between the parties involved.

Fourthly, he believed in freedom of education. The education for life must be free, i.e. not marred by demands from formal examinations and fixed requirements.

Fifthly, the educational process must reflect "the order of nature", the growth of life through childhood and adult personality to old age.

Grundtvig saw that the education carried out in "freedom, life, and naturalness" was to be the way in which the common man could make himself fit for democratic responsibility and full participation in civic duties and function under the Act introducing municipal self-government in 1841 and under the free constitution which in 1849 superseded almost 200 years of absolute monarchy.

When the first folk high school opened in 1844 it had received the prophet's blessing as a first realization of his great vision of an all-encompassing, new education for the Danish people based on Danish history, mythology, poetry, and mother tongue.

Christen Kold

The most important educationalist among the disciples of Grundtvig was Cristen Kold, 1816-70, who founded his school at Ryslinge on Funen in 1851.
He established the pattern which is still basic in folk high school: the residential setting, the 3-5 months' term, the homelike atmosphere, where students and teachers - with their families - live together, have their meals together and spend many leisure hours together.

His educational programme was simple.

His method of communication was "the living word", and the impression he made on his students was very strong, and lasted for a lifetime.

The dialogue, the simple talk illustrated with metaphors taken from everyday life, but borne by personality, was his gift to the folk high school. From his experience he phrased the formula "first awaken, then enlighten" - in modern terminology it may be "first motivate, then teach".

When Christen Kold used the word "enlighten" this word had achieved a different meaning from what it had during the period of Enlightenment. Kold was far from the rationalism and the ideas of "virtue" belonging to that era. What he meant was "enlightenment about life", - understanding, preoccupation with and engagement in life - a concept he had from Grundtvig.

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The Folk High School.

From the beginning the folk high schools proclaimed a triple purpose:

Firstly, to make the students love and understand their national history, culture, and art;

Secondly, to open their eyes for the wealth of spiritual life;

Thirdly, to help render the ordinary man fit for civic and democratic responsibility.

In the beginning of this talk I mentioned the fateful consequences of the Napoleonic wars.

To understand the thinking of Grundtvig and the original philosophy of the folk high schools - making it a sort of a popular movement - you must also recall the growing threat from the many German states unified under the influence of the nationalistic movements in Europe by the end of the nineteenth century. Not only was Germany united, but it was also more industrialized and economically more powerful than Denmark - and in many ways it threatened the integrety of the small neighbour.

It ended with a new national disaster after a short war in 1864. After having lost Norway in 1814, Denmark lost in 1864 a third of what was left to Prussia. So then it became what it is

today - a small nation, fighting for existence, having a language of its own, closely related to the other Scandinavian countries regarding culture. But after 1864 it was a depressed people, just about giving up.

During the years after this catastrophy three scores of folk high schools were started all over Denmark on the initiative of individual people who wanted to contribute to the awakening, revival, and enlightenment of the Danish peasant.

And then, after the folk high schools had been in operation for some years, the interest in vocational training was aroused, and agricultural schools or colleges sprang up, teaching the young generation of farmers new and better methods based on research and experiments carried out by the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural College in Copenhagen - but still educationally based on the ideas of the folk high schools.

In the folk high schools themselves very little, if any attention was - and is - paid to vocational training. Because of this, and since examinations were - and still are - considered to be contrary to the idea and work of these schools, it has been extremely difficult to evaluate their influence and importance in the formation of Danish culture and Danish society of today.

We firmly believe that it has had a great impact - and that it has contributed very much to creating a culturally speaking homogenous population, which is rather unique. An educational élite system alongside a cultural homogenous society.

I may clarify what I mean by an example:

It is generally assumed that there is a close connection between the existence of the folk high schools and the development of the cooperative movement, which is very strong in Denmark. Due to the cooperative system - and this is a fact - Danish agriculture was able to survive and even improve its standards during the crisis on the world grain market in the 1880's, when enormous and disastrous quantities of grain were thrown

into the European market from North America and Russia. - Swedish agriculture, for instance, did not cope with the problems, and you had the mass emigration from Sweden. Comparatively few emigrated from Denmark, and Danish farmers managed to shift their production from grain to animal and dairy products.

But the role of the folk high schools in this chapter is a rather indirect one.

It has been expressed this way:

These young farmers sat on the hard benches of the folk high schools and learned about the old gods Odin and Thor and about Danish literature and history - and after that they went home and created cooperative dairies.

The fact is that they had not been taught cooperative organization. But in some way or other they had been "awakened", had had their horizon widened, their eyes opened to possibilities and opportunities - and they became leaders in the farmers' associations, in local governments, in the political fight for recognition and then for power.

They had learned to listen with an open mind and to activate what they had learned - but in their own, personal way.

They did not need group work to become active and to make the new impressions and experiences an integral part of themselves - and to transfer it to action.

Sweden and Norway.

At this stage I may just indicate in a few sentences, what has happened in the other Scandinavian countries.

It is often stated that folk high schools sprang out of a very unique historical, political, and social situation. They managed, however, to consolidate and in spite of ups and downs they have become part of our general culture.

I do not know if it is that way. There have been many attempts to transfer the folk high school to other countries - but most have failed. Maybe because most have been too dogmatic.

In Sweden they were not, at that time, dogmatic. There are 24 years between the first folk high school in Rødding, Denmark, and the first ones in Sweden. That was not until 1868, when they had had a similar political and economic development as Denmark. But right from the beginning there has been a clear difference between the two ways - the Danish and the Swedish. Sweden was very much influenced by the French rationalism at the end of the eighteenth century, and thanks to the imported French royal family the German romanticism did not have the same impact in Sweden as in Denmark.

To put it short, in Sweden adult education in general was marked by university people, and the folk high schools got right from the beginning a role to play in the educational system. It has from the beginning been part of the educational system, and the written word, the book, has been more important in Sweden than in Denmark. - For instance, when Sweden got its first Act on elementary school in 1842, there was a provision for adult education, but relating it to the library. The Swedish folk high school has always endeavoured to be objective, reporting facts - not in an emotional, subjective way reviving students by the living word.

University people also played an important part in Norwegian adult education - for instance regarding subjects and methods. Already in 1864 professors and students at Oslo University started a systematic popular education for adults outside the walls of the university. This happens before the breakthrough of extra-mural activities at the British universities.

Also in 1864 the first Norwegian Folk High School was founded. There have been more ups and downs in the Norwegian folk high school - it has been more faithful to Grundtvig than Denmark; it has been more religiously orientated - but has also developed into a supplement and a regular alternative to the formal educational system attracting younger people.

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Danish Folk High Schools Today.

Today there are about 80 folk high schools in Denmark, and they are each year attended by about 9,000 young people, divided more or less evenly between boys and girls.

There are, of course, no formal entry qualifications; but the minimum age is about 18 years of age. The majority of the students will be 19 or 20.

All schools are private, independent, non-profitmaking bodies, and they are rather small. To maintain the homelike atmosphere most of them will have between 70 and 100 students at a time.

They are free schools which, by historical tradition, have achieved the position of being state-supported, 85%, but selfgoverning. No control of the teaching.

The folk high schools have used their independence in various ways in relation to the content and form of learning.

As you may have gathered, the folk high school concept is by no means rigid. Methods of learning vary from one school to another.

But they have certain features in common. They are residential, and the collective experience of the students forms the basis for discussions and debates.

Another common feature is the absence of final examinations, reports or competence-based tests.

Nevertheless, many institutions, training centers, and professions consider a folk high school course an advantage, so students can always obtain a report on request.

Most courses are still of 4-6 months' duration, although short courses lasting only a week can be approved.

The students themselves pay the 15% which remains after the government has covered 85% of the running expenses. In many cases the students can, however, obtain scholarships or grants.

What is important to bear in mind when talking about the folk high schools is that it is and has always been a form of education based more on emotional experiences than intellectual.

And as all Danes are said to be Grundtvigians, whatever they know and accept or not, you may note a certain anti-academic attitude in the Danish people. It may be good to be reserved and critical towards academics - but now and then this attitude may develop into a more dangerous anti-intellectual attitude.

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Adult Education.

But as I indicated in the beginning, Grundtvig, Kold, and the folk high schools are only a very small part of the Danish Adult Education system, though maybe the most exciting part seen from outside.

Through the folk high schools and the different closely related variations: Agricultural Colleges, Domestic Science Colleges, and Continuation Schools, Grundtvig has influenced our thinking about adult education in general - and certainly marked the quantitatively biggest part - the general, liberal, non-vocational adult education. This is adult education of a liberally enlightening character orientated towards personal development, expression, and emancipation.

Between 12 and 15% of the adult population will attend classes within this part of the educational system, although it is not competence-based, it does not assume any predetermined description of level, it does not pursue any pre-established or centrally dictated curricula, and it has not established any criteria for formal qualifications either for students or tutors.

As education should make people independent and able to act, and as freedom of education is a pre-condition for this, - as Grundtvig says, "Freedom costs nothing, but gives a lot - while force costs a lot, and gives nothing", it has always been stressed that the role of the state, government, is to make the

framework which makes it possible for the citizens to take action within this field. Freedom is a condition of society and not a matter of individual rights. Freedom must be approached by giving it to others, not by demanding it for oneself.

So this type of adult education has always been conducted by a large number of different sponsors, working independently as a matter of principle, and often regarding each others as competitors.

The ideal is that the initiative in adult education of a liberally enlightening character should be taken locally, first and foremost by private organisations, and by private persons.

This tradition is strengthened by the assumption that many of the sponsors are in close contact with many different sections of the community - the grass root contacts - and are thus in a position to administer the relevant offers to the best possible effect.

Where this ideal has worked - and it has worked in many parts of the country in longer periods - there you may find fine examples of community development - though this term is completely unknown in Denmark.

The manifest of the general liberal adult education is carried out under the Act on Leisure-time Instruction - securing about 75% public support for adult education classes. - About two thirds of these activities are now being carried out by 4 Educational Associations as they are called - linked up with different political parties, and with adult education as their only task.

Many of the sponsors have their roots in - and are themselves part of - the popular movements that sprang up in the nineteenth century.

Until a few years ago adult education in Denmark was identical with general, liberal, non-vocational education - or popular enlightenment, and is was not regarded as part of the

educational system. Rather it belonged to the area of cultural policy.

But during the late 60's Denmark witnessed a growing acceptance of the whole concept of adult education - making the traditional enlightenment-inspired part more educationally conscious and widening its field of work with for instance qualifying adult education - or second-chance for adults, and establishing some sort of ties between the traditional non-vocational part and the vocational educational activities which had developed rapidly on their own during the post-war period.

General agreement has been reached in recent years on the trend toward increasing priority for adult education.

A couple of White Papers in the early 70's confirmed these trends, but pointed out that for reasons of scarce ressources it will be necessary to consider the possibility of a redistribution within the education system as a whole - that means to take money from the formal system to adult education. And that is not easy. The easiest field to take money from for the benefit of adult education will be from research and higher education.

Forward Looking:

Just now a long-term planning process for education is being concluded. The process is based on 5 advisory councils - one of these dealing with all types of education for adults, and therefore among the members including representatives from all thinkable parts of adult and youth education.

They have agreed on some fundamental views as they are called for their work - and these views have a clear mark of Grundtvig.

"Man is a social creature", they say, "and develop himself by interplay between his given aptitudes and the constant influence from the world around him. No one can live alone. Relations between a human being and the world around are manifold, and they change from day to day in a reciprocal action, which determines the development both of man and of society.

So it is very important to have an overall view of man and his relations with the world. Experience proves narrow coherence between the individual and society, between body and mind, between work and leisure. - If these relations, or ties, are isolated from one another, if you forget the historical and cultural context, you will get a too limited picture of the human being - and education and policy based on this will fail."

I should like to conclude by stating that education as part of our cultural pattern is regarded a human right, and as such should be free of charge. Adult education is to the benefit of both society and individuals, and should be no exception to this rule.